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## **13th MEU Provides Assistance in Southern Iraq**

**NORTH ARABIAN GULF -- Elements of the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) completed humanitarian assistance, anti-smuggling and security and stabilization operations in southern Iraq as part of Operation Sweeney here today. The MEU(SOC), assigned to Expeditionary Strike Group One (ESG-1), delivered food, provided medical and dental capability and produced over 3000 gallons of water to citizens in the region.**

**The MEU contributed significantly to the coalition effort ashore, conducting more than 300 patrols in southern Iraq, 50 of which were riverine operations from its boat company. It also trained local police in the setup and operation of security checkpoints, confiscated weapons and destroyed more than 2000 rounds of ordnance, much of which was found in areas near villages and playgrounds.**

**ESG-1 is among the most recent of U.S. forces to join the coalition reconstruction effort in Iraq, arriving in the region in early October. While the MEU operated ashore throughout southern Iraq in support of the British-led Multinational Division Southeast, USS Peleliu (LHA 5), USS Ogden (LPD 5), USS Port Royal (CG 73) and USS Germantown (LSD 42) operated with the U.S. Coast Guard and coalition forces from Britain, Australia and Italy in support of multinational Maritime Interception Operations.**

**“This was a total team effort,” said Col. Mike Regner, Commanding Officer, 13th MEU(SOC). “The Navy and Marine team of the ESG got the opportunity to do what we’ve been trained to do, and it’s made even more rewarding because we could work directly with the Iraqi people and get immediate satisfaction from the job we did,” Regner said.**

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The operation also provided Marine and Navy units the opportunity to contribute to the re-establishment of the Iraqi judiciary as the country goes about cracking down on smuggling and other illegal activities. On Aug. 31, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) issued a new confiscation order allowing Iraq's judicial system to investigate alleged smugglers and return the stolen goods to the people of Iraq.

ESG-1 units helped legitimize the order, both ashore and at sea. The MEU turned over 50 people to Iraqi police for prosecution in Iraqi courts for various criminal activities, and confiscated three vessels for smuggling. At sea, coalition forces continued to facilitate the movement of Iraqi judicial officials to sea to conduct hearings aboard detained smuggling vessels to adjudicate the cases. The most recent hearing was Oct. 18 aboard USS Fletcher.

Coalition officials estimate that oil smuggling costs the Iraqi people approximately \$200,000 per day, along with the loss of one of its most marketable resources. This is money that Navy officials believe could go to the benefit of the Iraqi people.

"A pillar of our mission is to provide combatant commanders the flexibility to conduct missions across the spectrum of conflict. Our mission here, ashore with the 13th MEU, as well as at sea with our maritime forces, has been a validation of our ability to provide that kind of flexibility. I couldn't be more proud of the contributions our Marines and Sailors made to Operation Sweeney," said Rear Adm. Bob Conway, Jr., Commander, ESG-1.

ESG-1 continues to support multinational Maritime Interception Operations in support of Commander, U.S. Fifth Fleet.

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*For further questions, please contact ESG-1 Public Affairs Office at 619-545-4428 or [esg1pao@peleliu.navy.mil](mailto:esg1pao@peleliu.navy.mil).*